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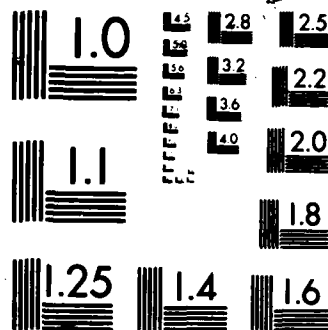
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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

RED TERROR IN THE SKY:  
SOVIET AERIAL AGGRESSION, 1946-1986

MAJOR MARTIN C. ALVSTAD

87-0095

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**TITLE** RED TERROR IN THE SKY: SOVIET AERIAL AGGRESSION, 1946-1986

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## PREFACE

The world was both shocked and surprised when a Soviet aircraft shot down a Korean airliner in September of 1983 resulting in the deaths of 269 people. Research from 1946 through 1986 indicates that the Soviets have shot down numerous aircraft around their borders prior to the KAL-007 tragedy. Examination of these Soviet shootdowns will establish a motive for this aerial aggression.

This article will determine that the Soviet motive for their aerial aggression is based on their paranoia that the outside world is trying to spy on them. The Soviets have proven consistently that they will destroy any aircraft violating their borders and will attack well beyond their airspace if intelligence gathering is suspected. Based on this motive, the KAL-007 tragedy should have been predictable and therefore avoided.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Major Martin C. Alvstad enlisted in the Air Force in January 1973 and was commissioned via OTS in June 1974. He has served as an F-4E Weapon Systems Officer, F-4C/G Electronic Warfare Officer (EWO), Instructor EWO, and EWO Standardization Evaluation Flight Examiner. Major Alvstad's academic achievements include a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and a Master of Arts Degree in Business Management and Supervision from Central Michigan University. He is a graduate of Squadron Officer School and has completed Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) by seminar. Prior to attending ACSC in residence, Major Alvstad was an Electronic Warfare Air Defense Analyst at the Intelligence Center Pacific, United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii. While in that job, he was responsible for documentation and analysis of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, People's Republic of China, and North Korean air defense response to U.S. Peacetime Aerial Reconnaissance Program (PARPRO) missions flown in USPACOM. Following graduation from Air Command and Staff College, Major Alvstad will return to flying as an EWO in the F-4G at George AFB, California. Major Alvstad has two daughters, Aimee and Heather.



RED TERROR IN THE SKY;  
SOVIET AERIAL AGGRESSION, 1946-1986

The diplomatic corps and Westerners in general have always been considered by this government, with its Byzantine spirit, and by Russia as a whole, as malevolent and jealous spies. . . . They (the Russians) have a dexterity in lying, a naturalness in falsehood, the success of which is as revolting to my candor as it is appalling to me. . . . Everything that gives a meaning and a goal to political institutions reduces itself here to one lone sentiment--fear.

Astolphe Louis Leonard Marquis de Custine  
1839

On 1 September 1983 a Su-15 FLAGON interceptor aircraft of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) air defense forces shot down an unarmed South Korean airliner, resulting in the deaths of 269 people (p. 26).<sup>1</sup> The world was shocked and surprised by this loss of human life. But should the world have been surprised? Since the end of World War (WW) II, there have been over 80 aerial incidents in which aircraft from one country have shot at, forced down, or shot down aircraft from another country, (see Appendix, p. 30). Over three-fourths of these attacks were perpetrated by the USSR, Warsaw Pact, or Soviet allies. The Soviet Union alone is responsible for nearly one-half of the total incidents, including the shootdown of approximately 20 known aircraft and the deaths of over 350 people. This article will survey Soviet aerial aggression since WW II and suggest a motive for

this aggression. To support this motive, it will examine several incidents that preceded the Korean Air Lines (KAL) disaster and conclude with lessons that can be learned to avoid a repeat of KAL-007.

Research from 1946 through 1986 indicates, with few exceptions, that the Soviets launch these air attacks in response to a real or perceived violation of their territorial borders or sovereign airspace for the purpose of spying. In many cases, these borders were under contention, as was the case following WW II with the Berlin Corridor, Warsaw Pact, and Kuril Islands. The Soviets have proven consistently that they will attack and down any aircraft violating their borders and will attack even well beyond their airspace if intelligence gathering is suspected. In addition, the USSR has been nondiscriminating with regard to who, what, and where they attack.

Who they attack include aircraft from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Iran, South Korea, Sweden, United States, and West Germany. What they attack are both civilian and military aircraft. Although less than 25 percent of the Soviet provoked incidents involved civilian aircraft, the loss in human lives accounted for over 75 percent, primarily because the civilian aircraft were commercial airliners (e.g. KAL-007). Finally, the Soviet Union does not discriminate as to where they attack. Incidents have occurred along nearly every region of their borders and within the Warsaw Pact (p. 26).

This lack of discrimination will be evident upon examination of several key incidents beginning with the 1950 shootdown of an unarmed US Navy patrol craft.

On 8 April 1950 an unarmed American Navy Privateer patrol aircraft with 10 men aboard disappeared on a routine training flight from Germany to Denmark (p. 26). Three days later, during which time a rescue squadron had been searching the Baltic for the plane, the Soviet Union issued a note of protest to Washington charging that a B-29 "Flying Fortress" (Super Fortress) had penetrated 21 kilometers into the territory of the USSR on 8 April in approximately the same location as the missing Navy Privateer. The Soviet note further charged that the Navy aircraft not only failed to respond to the Soviet fighters' attempts to force it to land, but opened fire on the Soviet fighters. In retaliation, the Soviets fired on the aircraft, and it turned toward the Baltic Sea and disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

While Moscow claimed they fired on a B-29 "Flying Fortress" which had fired on them first in their airspace, the only aircraft flying in that area on 8 April was the unarmed Navy Privateer. In defense of the Soviet Union's mistaken aircraft identity, the Privateer has four engines like the B-29. However, it is a smaller aircraft with a shorter nose. The major flaw in the Soviet story is the Navy aircraft could not have fired first. In fact, the American

aircraft could not have fired at all because its gun barrels had been dismounted.<sup>3</sup>

A second major flaw in Moscow's account is the location of the incident. The Soviets stated after they had fired on the Privateer, it turned toward the Baltic Sea and disappeared. However, five Latvian fishermen, who escaped to Sweden two years later, witnessed the shootdown and testified the fighters attacked the US plane and it crashed into the sea.<sup>4</sup> The Soviet pilots must have seen the plane crash into the sea, not turn toward the Baltic and disappear. Additionally, based on the Privateer's departure time, last known reported position, and airspeed, it would have been nearly impossible for it to have violated Soviet territory at the time of the incident as reported by Moscow.<sup>5</sup> The plane more likely was in international airspace over the Baltic Sea.

A final flaw in the Soviet case is the actual handling of the entire event. While the Scandinavian countries were extremely helpful in the search and rescue attempt, the Soviets made no effort to find the aircraft or its crew.<sup>6</sup> In fact, a Soviet minesweeper chased a Swedish fishing boat away from the area where possible wreckage of the American aircraft had been found. Additionally, three Danish fishing vessels operating in this area were reported missing, supporting speculation that the Soviet patrols may have been under orders to prevent small craft from gathering evidence from the shootdown.<sup>7</sup> Instead of expressing any apology or regret,

Moscow used this incident to accuse the US of violating the recognized rules of international law.<sup>8</sup> The four Soviet aviators involved in the incident were awarded the Order of the Red Banner and praised highly by Lieutenant General Vassily Stalin, son of Premier Stalin.<sup>9</sup> Why did Moscow react in this manner?

The Soviets had been building up their naval port in the Baltic to make it their largest naval base in the area (p. 26). Additionally, secret military installations had also been constructed which were of strategic importance to the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> There were probably sensitive military capabilities here which the Soviet Union did not want the Western world to know about and therefore were prepared to deny that information to the outside world. Moscow perceived the Navy Privateer as a threat to their secrecy and destroyed the aircraft with 10 aboard, regardless of a right to operate in international airspace.

With the exception of two life rafts, part of a nose gear, and miscellaneous other items, no trace of the Privateer or its crew was ever recovered.<sup>11</sup> However in 1955, five years after the incident, an American released from a Soviet prison camp claimed that fellow prisoners had knowledge of American servicemen imprisoned in Siberia. Eight crewmembers from the Navy Privateer shot down in the Baltic were specifically mentioned by a Yugoslavian prisoner.<sup>12</sup> The United States requested specific information from the Soviet Union on

Americans who had been seen in various prison slave camps.<sup>13</sup> The Kremlin denied holding any servicemen shot down over the past years, refused any further investigation into this incident, and closed the issue.<sup>14</sup> In the years to come, three more aircraft were "lost" in the Baltic, including two Swedish aircraft in 1952.

On 16 June 1952 an unarmed Swedish Air Force Catalina flying boat was shot down by two Soviet MiG fighters in international airspace over the Baltic Sea (p. 26). Two of the seven crewmen were wounded and the plane was forced to ditch into the sea. They were immediately picked up by a German freighter. Ironically, the flying boat was involved in a search mission for a Swedish C-54 training plane that had disappeared in the same area three days earlier.<sup>15</sup> The Soviet account of the incident is similar to the 1950 Navy Privateer incident but quite different from the Swedish version. Moscow charged the Catalina was not in international airspace but was violating Soviet territory. The Kremlin claimed its fighters signaled the Catalina to land but the pilot refused and opened fire at the Soviet MiGs, at which time the fighters returned fire and the Catalina ditched into the sea.<sup>16</sup> The crew of the Swedish aircraft stated the MiGs made seven firing bursts lasting approximately 10 minutes, during which time the Catalina and crew were defenseless.<sup>17</sup>

As with the Navy Privateer incident in 1950, the Soviet version of this shootdown has some notable flaws. The first

and most glaring flaw is Moscow's claim that the flying boat fired first. The Swedish government purchased their Catalinas unarmed from Canada and had not modified them with any type of armament.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it would seem impossible for the Swedes to fire first.

The second flaw in the Soviet story, like the 1950 incident, is the shootdown location. Unlike the earlier incident in which there was no evidence or survivors, the Catalina crew lived to tell their story, which included verification of their position over international waters. This location was also reinforced by the German freighter that picked up the crew within minutes of their ditching, leaving little doubt that the Catalina was indeed operating over international waters when it went down.

The Kremlin's final flaw was their uncooperative and defensive attitude in handling these two downed aircraft incidents. If, indeed, the Soviets did shoot down the C-54, the aircraft the Catalina was searching for when it was shot down, why didn't the USSR issue a statement as they had with the 1950 Navy Privateer shootdown? Interesting to note, a life raft belonging to the C-54 (the first Swedish aircraft to go down) was recovered with machine gun bullet holes in it.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps the Soviets thought they had destroyed all the evidence including the crew and had nothing to explain. Further complicating the incident, a Finnish fishing boat was in the immediate area where the Catalina was shot down. Unfortunately, the Finnish boat and crew disappeared before

they could be questioned about the shootdown. Had the German freighter not made an expeditious recovery of the Swedish crew, there may have been no survivors to tell the real story. As before, Moscow would not agree to any investigation and continued to press their story of territorial violation and armed aggression by the Swedish Air Force. They offered no humane assistance, no regret, no public/private apology, and even when faced with hard evidence, the Soviets would not alter their story nor agree to any form of indemnity.<sup>20</sup>

A plausible reason for the Soviet attack was, in addition to the sensitive naval base in the Baltic, the Soviets were also building major guided missile bases on their Baltic islands (p. 26). These bases were of significant strategic value against Scandinavian targets.<sup>21</sup> The tragic results of these two shootdowns were the loss of a C-54 transport aircraft with eight crewmen unaccounted for and the loss of a Catalina flying boat sent out to search for it. In 1957, the Swedish Foreign Ministry announced they had evidence the Kremlin was holding the crew of the C-54 in a Siberian prison camp.<sup>22</sup> However, the Soviet Union disclosed no additional information on the status of the missing Swedish crewmen. A less serious incident occurred in the Bering Sea three years later.

On 22 June 1955 an American Navy Neptune patrol plane was attacked by two Soviet MiGs in international airspace near St. Lawrence Island over the Bering Sea (p. 26). The Soviet



fighters made one firing pass on the Neptune igniting a fire in one engine, forcing the aircraft to crash land on the northwestern tip of St. Lawrence Island. The Neptune did not return fire. Three of the eleven crewmembers were wounded by the Soviet attack and four more crewmembers were severely burned when the aircraft crash landed and burned. The crew was rescued by local natives and the injured medically evacuated for hospitalization. At the time of the attack, the Navy aircraft was about 40 miles southwest of St. Lawrence Island in international airspace.<sup>23</sup> Moscow claimed an exchange of fire took place when the Soviet aircraft approached the American aircraft to "inform" them of violating Soviet airspace.<sup>24</sup>

The Soviet story contains two inconsistencies: who fired first and where the attack took place. First, the USSR stated their fighters approached the Neptune to communicate with its crew when an exchange of fire took place. This implies that the Navy aircraft fired first, since the Soviet fighter's mission was to warn the American aircraft that USSR airspace was being violated; however, the Navy pilot stated the MiGs approached from such an angle that he didn't see them coming. The Neptune is armed with a single .50 caliber machine gun in the nose and therefore couldn't have been employed against the MiGs due to the fighter's attack direction.<sup>25</sup> It would appear, based on the pilot's description of the surprise attack and the fact the crew of the Neptune didn't fire back, the Soviet's statement of an "exchange of fire" was not

correct. This accusation is the same charge that the Soviets made in the Baltic shootdowns.

The second inconsistency in the Soviet story is the location of the attack. Although the Soviets claimed the Navy Neptune had violated their airspace, a closer review indicates this attack actually occurred in international airspace. The Navy plane's position was being tracked by a ground radar station when it was attacked.<sup>26</sup> The radar plot of the plane's position, combined with the crew's statement of their location based on their aircraft navigation instruments, confirms the Neptune was operating over international waters. Additionally, the Navy pilot had to be close enough to St. Lawrence Island to enable him to fly a crippled burning aircraft in for a crash landing.<sup>27</sup> There is a positive note to this incident because previously the Soviets had reacted indifferently, and offered no regrets or indemnity. In this case, they issued an apology for the action of their armed forces and offered to compensate for one-half the cost of the Navy aircraft.<sup>28</sup> Why did the Soviets apologize and offer indemnity?

The motive for their sudden turnabout in expressing regret and offering reimbursement is quite simple. This shootdown occurred less than a month before a Big Four (US, USSR, Great Britain, and France) peace conference in Geneva, Switzerland.<sup>29</sup> The apology was an attempt to warm up the atmosphere for the upcoming talks. However, the fact remains

the Soviet pilots, following orders, shot down a Navy patrol craft over international waters. The motive for this aggressive act was, like the previous incidents, a compelling need to protect their homeland from outside intruders. The Navy Neptune was considered a threat to their sovereign coast and anything located there Moscow wanted to guard from American sensors. The Soviets downed the plane with nearly fatal results. Although all 11 crewmembers of the Neptune survived the attack and crash landing, two of the crewmembers were permanently disabled and discharged from the Navy.<sup>30</sup> The crew of an Air Force transport aircraft was not as fortunate three years later.

On 2 September 1958 an American C-130 transport aircraft, with 17 crewmen aboard, disappeared on a flight near Soviet Armenia (p. 26). The last reported position by the aircraft's pilot was made approximately 110 miles southwest of Soviet territory. The United States immediately began a search and rescue effort.<sup>31</sup> On 6 September the United States asked the Soviet Union and Iran if they had any information on the missing aircraft.<sup>32</sup> On 12 September Moscow informed Washington that the C-130, missing for 10 days, had crashed in Armenia killing six crewmen.<sup>33</sup> Washington, in a note to the Kremlin, asked for an accounting of the missing 11 airmen and permission to inspect the crash site. In its limited investigation, the Americans did find eyewitnesses who saw Soviet fighters intercept the C-130 near the USSR-Turkey border and escort it to the east. The witnesses also

testified that a short time later they heard an explosion and saw smoke rising from the hills in the direction the C-130 and Soviet fighters had been flying.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, tape recordings of the Soviet ground and air communications, presumably obtained from American monitoring stations along the Turkish-Soviet border, clearly substantiate the Soviets tracked the American transport, scrambled fighters, and shot it down.<sup>35</sup> According to the Kremlin, the C-130 had intentionally violated Armenian territory, proceeded for some distance, and then "fell" inside the USSR, thereby proving it had penetrated their sovereign borders.<sup>36</sup> This story is badly flawed by both the Turkish eyewitness accounts and the monitoring stations' tape recordings.

Moscow credibility is also questionable after examination of the way they handled this entire incident. Why did the Kremlin wait 10 days before informing Washington they had "found" the wreckage of the missing C-130? The pilots of the fighters that "escorted" the C-130 into the ground knew the location of the crash site and reported it to their superiors. Why weren't American officials allowed in to investigate the crash site? Why did Moscow delay until 24 September, 22 days, in releasing the bodies of the six airmen who died in the crash?<sup>37</sup> Finally, why was the USSR continually silent about the other 11 missing airmen whose families were desperately awaiting any information? The standard Kremlin response to all the American inquiries was that the responsibility for this incident lay not with the USSR but with Washington.<sup>38</sup>

Why did the Soviets destroy this aircraft? (The author does not believe it "fell" by itself.) The USSR apparently had something to hide in Armenia and were prepared to protect that secret. The disappearance of the C-130 in this area was not an isolated incident. Just three months earlier another USAF transport aircraft was also shot down.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, in 1962 a Belgium airliner was forced down here<sup>40</sup> and, in 1963 an Iranian aerial survey plane was shot down in the USSR-Turkey-Iran border region.<sup>41</sup> The United States was never allowed to inspect the crash site of the C-130 to determine the cause of the crash and 11 USAF airmen are still unaccounted for.<sup>42</sup> Even the Soviet newspapers omitted mentioning the 11 missing crewmen so the Soviet people would know nothing about the missing men. Ironically, three years later (in 1961) a Soviet magazine containing an article dealing with American espionage activities indicated the missing airmen from the C-130 had parachuted safely and were captured.<sup>43</sup> Five days after the article was released, the same magazine published a disclaimer stating the author of the article had made an incorrect assumption concerning the C-130.<sup>44</sup> Moscow considered the case closed.<sup>45</sup> History would show that three more USAF airmen would join the "unaccounted for" list over the Barents Sea.

On 1 July 1960 a USAF RB-47 reconnaissance aircraft disappeared over the Barents Sea in international airspace, 50 miles north of the Kola Peninsula (p. 26). The US immediately began a search and rescue effort for the missing aircraft and

crewmembers. Ten days later, Moscow released a note to Washington stating they shot down an American bomber that penetrated USSR airspace and refused instruction to land. Two of the six crewmembers were rescued by a Soviet vessel and a third body was also recovered.<sup>46</sup> The flaws in the Kremlin story lie in the location of the attack and once again their unusual handling of the incident.

The location of the RB-47 when the MiG opened fire was clearly in international airspace some 50 miles from the USSR. This fact was verified by the aircraft navigator's accurate radar fix prior to the shootdown,<sup>47</sup> and by another accurate radar plot of the RB-47's ground track obtained from a ground-based radar tracking facility.<sup>48</sup> The plane had every right to be where it was, on a routine mission over international waters.

The second Soviet flaw, like earlier incidents, is the way in which they handled the shootdown. In the 1950 Navy Privateer incident, Moscow waited three days after the shootdown before issuing a statement. In this RB-47 incident, they waited 10 days before telling the world they shot down an aircraft, recovering three crewmembers. The USAF had been searching the Barents Sea for 10 days, yet Moscow refused to come forth earlier with valuable, possibly even lifesaving information. While this lengthy delay cast doubt over the Kremlin's credibility in explaining the shootdown, it also gave their political machine time to build the incident into

an international issue. It is important to note that this shootdown occurred two months after the shootdown of Francis Gary Powers in a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft over the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup> The U-2 incident, due to contradictory statements issued by Washington before all the facts were known, caused considerable embarrassment to the American government. As a result, overflight of the USSR or its claimed territory was ordered halted by President Eisenhower. Moscow seized this RB-47 incident to proclaim to the world that President Eisenhower had destroyed the upcoming summit conference by both approving the May 1st U-2 flight and now, by contradicting his promise of no more Soviet Union overflights. The Kremlin accused Washington of continuing a policy of deliberate provocation against the USSR, thereby threatening world peace.<sup>50</sup> The United States asked the Soviet Union's assistance in a joint search effort and investigation into the RB-47 incident.<sup>51</sup> Other than having one vessel in the area, the Soviets again offered no assistance and refused a joint search for the plane and three remaining crewmen.<sup>52</sup> The United States demanded that an Embassy official be allowed to meet with the two surviving crewmen and that the two crewmen and body of the third be returned immediately.<sup>53</sup> The Soviets eventually returned the body of the dead crewmember.<sup>54</sup> However, they refused to release the other two men or allow any communication between them and the Embassy. For the next seven months these two survivors would remain in solitary confinement until their release in January 1961 following the

inauguration of John F. Kennedy.<sup>55</sup> As with other incidents, the pilot of the MiG that shot down the RB-47 was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.<sup>56</sup>

This incident is different from previous incidents because the Soviets, while refusing all American offers for a joint or bilateral investigation specified in the United Nations (UN) Charter, did insist on an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to consider the RB-47 incident. This meeting, endorsed by Washington, was part of a continuing effort by Moscow to build this issue into international status.<sup>57</sup> The U-2 and RB-47 incidents, and publicity in the UN resulted in the cessation of the U-2 program. From the Soviet point of view, they had forced an end to the U-2 overflights and were now attempting to shut down all US reconnaissance efforts against the Iron Curtain.<sup>58</sup>

The RB-47 and remaining three crewmembers were never found.<sup>59</sup> The Soviet Union refused any further investigation into the incident. The aggressive actions by the USSR continued. Another reported shootdown occurred in 1964 when three USAF officers died in a shootdown over East Germany.

On 28 January 1964 an unarmed Air Force T-39 jet trainer strayed across the East German border during a storm and was shot down by Soviet aircraft, killing all three officers on board (p. 26). Moscow claimed both visual signals and warning shots ordering the plane to land failed; therefore, their fighter, in accordance with standing Soviet orders concerning airspace violators, shot the aircraft down. The T-39 crashed



40 miles inside East Germany.<sup>60</sup> USAF radar operators tracking the aircraft made numerous radio calls telling the T-39 to turn back. American aircraft were also scrambled to try and intercept the T-39 before it entered communist territory, but failed. The Kremlin protested the T-39 had violated the East German frontier, a fact well known to the United States. Like previous incidents, Moscow also charged the United States with photoreconnaissance spying.<sup>61</sup> The East Germans also charged the American trainer was on a prepared espionage mission.<sup>62</sup>

While there is no doubt the aircraft did indeed violate East German airspace, there is reason to question the Soviet charge of deliberate provocation and aerial photo-reconnaissance. It is quite clear from evidence and testimony that the T-39 was experiencing not only radio problems but also navigation problems. The USSR charged it was difficult to believe three experienced officers flying over known landmarks could become lost. However, landmarks can appear similar and faulty instruments combined with a storm in the area can cause disorientation. Flying several miles a minute, on an incorrect heading, can quickly put a plane significantly off course. The flight plan filed by the T-39's crew placed their route of flight no closer than 50 miles from the East German border, had they adhered to it.<sup>63</sup> Or perhaps the trainer was lured off course by a false navigation signal from East Germany. President Eisenhower spoke of this danger in a news conference held in 1959.<sup>64</sup> All of these factors, combined with the US/NATO air defense system scrambling

interceptors to prevent the T-39 from flying into East Germany substantiate the intrusion into East Germany was not a deliberate provocation but simply a case of an unarmed training plane getting lost.

It is illogical to suggest the United States would send an unarmed training aircraft with no photoreconnaissance capability piloted by three Air Force officers untrained in photo intelligence gathering into East Germany to take pictures in a storm. If the T-39 did contain the appropriate photographic equipment, it is extremely doubtful the Soviets would have released the wreckage of the plane.<sup>65</sup> Further, if the aircraft had any of this equipment, it is quite certain that Moscow would have publicized this for its maximum propaganda value. As is usually the case with the Kremlin, no regret, apology, or indemnity was ever offered. Once again the question is, why shoot an airplane down that is obviously no threat?

Soviet policy is simple and fatally clear. If an aircraft violates USSR airspace or that of its Warsaw Pact allies, it will be forced down or shot down. In the case of the T-39, it will never be known if the Soviet fighters did indeed signal it to land, fired warning shots, or just shot it down with no warning. One could speculate that the MiG pilots may have heard the warning calls to the T-39 on a guarded radio frequency (a frequency reserved for emergencies) and perhaps knew the aircraft was having communication/navigation difficulty.<sup>66</sup> By destroying the aircraft, the Soviets

successfully contributed to the termination of USAF training in the region. As a result of this shootdown and the shootdown of an RB-66 reconnaissance aircraft five weeks later in this area, the Pentagon banned all training flights in a 70 mile wide buffer zone along the East German border.<sup>67</sup> Using aerial aggression, the Soviet Union succeeded in forcing the US to prohibit flying close to USSR or Warsaw Pact borders. Like the 1960 cessation of the U-2 program, this prohibition helped Moscow mask their military activities considerably. There have been at least 25 incidents in the Warsaw Pact and the Berlin Corridor, including several airliner attacks. An airline incident occurred eight years later in a different part of the world.

On 30 June 1968 an American Seaboard World Airlines DC-8 Super 63 aircraft, chartered by the USAF Military Airlift Command, was intercepted by Soviet aircraft near the Soviet claimed Kuril Islands and forced to land (p. 26). The airliner contained 214 servicemen bound for Vietnam and a crew of 17. The planned route of flight for the airliner would bring it no closer to the Kuril Islands than 80 miles. The American airliner was not damaged nor were any of the passengers or crew injured in the episode.<sup>68</sup> The passengers spent two days and nights on the ground in the airliner before Moscow released them to continue on to Vietnam.<sup>69</sup>

Compared with other incidents, this force down of an American airliner seems straight forward; however, closer examination of this incident reveals that Soviet paranoia

about spying was evident. Two questions need to be addressed: was the airliner really off course and why did the Soviets force it to land? As usual, there was controversy over the location of the airliner when it was intercepted by the Soviet fighter. Ironically, the Soviet Union did not escalate this incident into a "deliberate provocation" as they had in the past. It was Washington that stated initially the airliner may have strayed off course!<sup>70</sup> Later, the US verified this fact with radar data and apologized to the USSR for the violation.<sup>71</sup> However, the Japanese, also using radar data, claimed that the American airliner was intercepted over international waters and then forced to alter course, taking it into Soviet territory.<sup>72</sup> The crew of the airliner, including an additional check pilot and check engineer also testified that their aircraft was not off course when the MiGs intercepted them. However, the pilot of the airliner was forced to sign a document saying that the plane had violated USSR airspace before the Soviets would release the plane, its passengers, or crew.<sup>73</sup> Regardless of where the airliner was, the fact remains it was intercepted and forced down. Why didn't the fighters simply force the airliner to depart Soviet airspace instead? The Soviets, obsessed with protecting their sensitive military complexes and secrets, thought the airliner was on a spy mission. The flight crew of the airliner testified they "had undergone intensive but courteous interrogation. They seemed to think we were spies."<sup>74</sup>

This entire incident was downplayed significantly by both the Soviet Union (they never released the story to the press) and the US, probably because these two Superpowers had just agreed to arms control negotiations.<sup>75</sup> This could explain why Washington was so quick to state the airliner may have been off course, which is still questionable, and for their apology to the USSR.<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the political climate, one fact remains: the Soviets will intercept any aircraft operating in or near its territory and either force that aircraft down or shoot it down. More than a dozen known incidents have occurred in this part of the world including six actual shootdowns and more than 300 deaths. In fact, another KAL aircraft was involved in a potentially tragic force down in 1978 in a different strategic Soviet Union location, the Kola Peninsula.

On 20 April 1978 at approximately 10:45 PM local time, a KAL Boeing 707 airliner, with 97 passengers and 13 crewmembers, was forced down by a Soviet MiG aircraft over the Kola Peninsula (p. 26). The MiG fired several cannon bursts which ripped through the aircraft's fuselage, killing two passengers and injuring 16 others, two seriously. The KAL pilot descended from 35,000 feet to 3,000 feet in five minutes and spent nearly two hours looking for a place to land. Shortly after midnight, the airliner made a gear up landing on a frozen lake 650 miles north of Moscow. After the passengers and crew waited two hours in the aircraft, Soviet troops and helicopters arrived to transport them to a stadium to board

buses and be driven to a community center where they would spend the next 36 hours. On 22 April, the passengers were flown by two Soviet Aeroflot airliners to Murmansk to rendezvous with an American Pan American airliner to transport them home. The pilot and navigator of the airliner were detained by Soviet authorities.<sup>77</sup>

There is no doubt the airliner was off course and over USSR territory when it was forced down. However, closer examination of this KAL flight exposes a lack of Soviet credibility in their account of the incident and their paranoia in dealing with suspected foreign reconnaissance missions, both of which have been evident in past incidents.

Moscow waited 12 hours before releasing any information to the American Embassy in Moscow. It should be noted here the American Embassy handled South Korean affairs.<sup>78</sup> Even after 12 hours, the Soviet account was inconsistent with the facts.<sup>78</sup> Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei N. Kosygin stated the two deaths and injuries were a result of the plane's crash landing. Additionally, Moscow never acknowledged the airliner was shot at by Soviet aircraft.<sup>79</sup> The Kremlin also claimed several of their jets tried to warn the KAL pilot by wagging their wings and flashing their lights. However, over a dozen passengers sitting on the left side of the aircraft watching the MiG had seen no wagging of wings or flashing of lights. The passengers also said only one Soviet fighter was involved instead of several aircraft as Moscow claimed.<sup>80</sup> It would appear no obvious warning was given to the KAL airliner.

Why didn't the MiG simply escort the airliner away from Soviet territory, instead of opening fire on it? This aggressive act by the fighter pilot was aimed at preventing the KAL plane from leaving Soviet territory. This airliner could have joined other aircraft that have "disappeared" over the years had it not been for the immediate descent initiated by the pilot and his skill in making a gear up landing at night on a frozen lake. Moscow did not want this airliner to escape nor did it want any of the passengers or crew to communicate with the outside world. While in custody by the Soviets, the passengers and crew were not allowed to contact anyone for the 36 hours they waited for transportation.<sup>81</sup> Even when the passengers and crew were released, the pilot and navigator were detained for interrogation and not "pardoned" for nearly 10 days.<sup>82</sup> Why the secrecy and interrogation? The plane was off course and headed for strategically sensitive military installations (p. 26).<sup>83</sup> The Kremlin suspected the airliner was on an intelligence gathering mission and was prepared to terminate this threat to the Soviet Union.

The inflight recorder from the KAL Boeing 707, the "black-box" that records such vital aircraft information as its position and communication, was never released by the Soviet Union.<sup>84</sup> This "black-box" could have answered several questions as to how the KAL jet "wandered" so far off course. The airliner left on the frozen lake reportedly sank to the bottom when the ice melted.<sup>85</sup> Although only two passengers

were killed in this KAL incident, the potential for a much more fatal disaster was clearly evident. Unfortunately, the lesson was not learned here, nor the warning heeded. If the aviation community and the world had taken notice, then perhaps the most recent KAL-007 disaster, nearly five and one-half years later, could have been avoided.

The similarity between the KAL incident in 1968 and the KAL-007 disaster of 1983 is remarkable. Both were Korean civilian airliners, on long, over water flights. Both were extremely far off course and attacked during hours of darkness. Both were flying near sensitive Soviet military complexes and subsequently accused of participating in aerial espionage.<sup>86</sup> Both aircraft went down and neither aircraft was ever recovered nor was information from their "black boxes" made public.<sup>87</sup> The message is clear: not only were these tragic incidents very similar to each other, the last KAL 007 shootdown was also similar to several prior incidents over the years, demonstrating vividly the determination of the USSR to ward off unwanted "visitors."

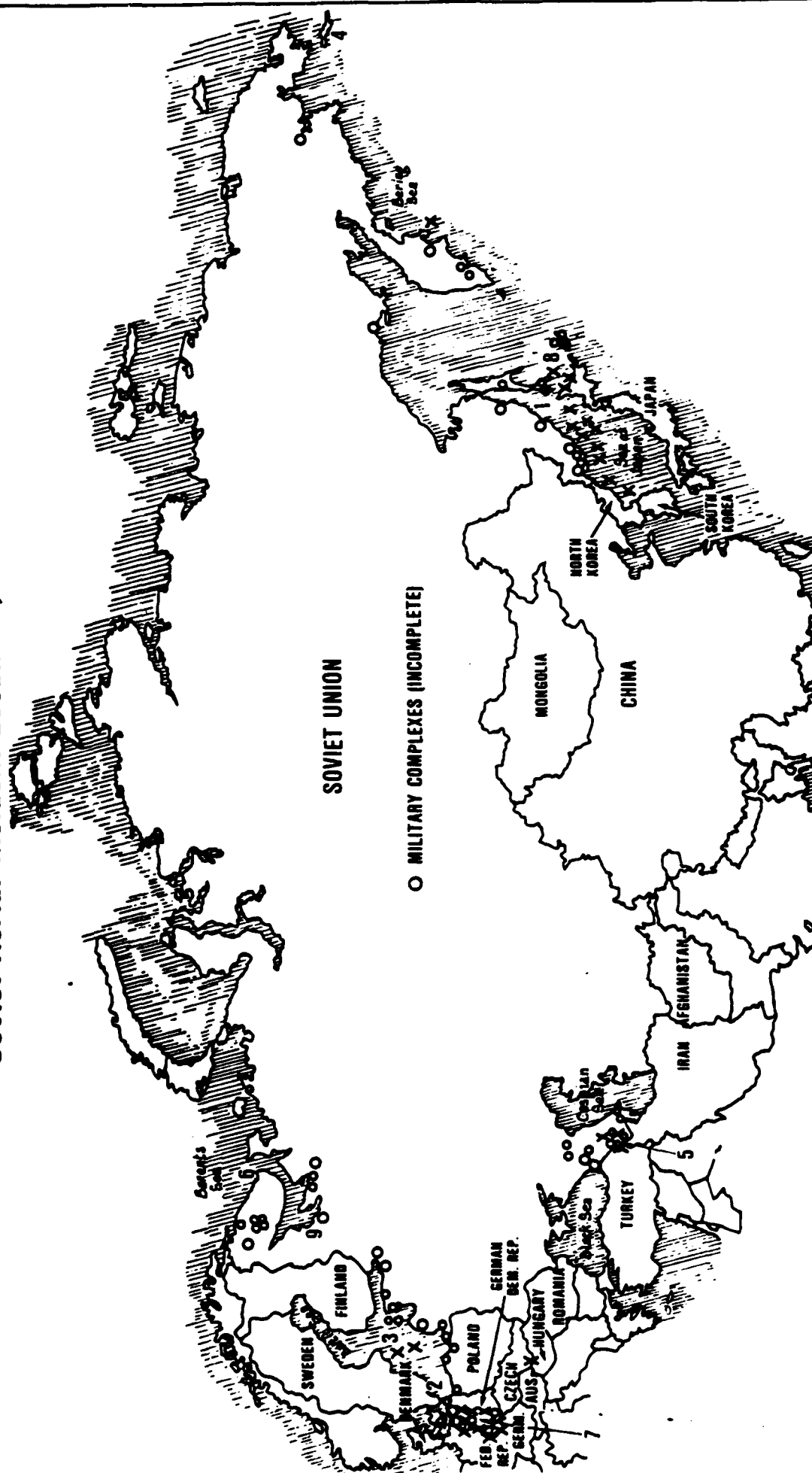
This article specifically examines eight incidents, mentions several others, and lists still more in the Appendix, most of which have a common denominator: the Soviet paranoia about protecting their homeland and guarding their secrets. If an aircraft flies near a sensitive Soviet military complex--in or near USSR airspace, it will be challenged, attacked, and possibly destroyed. The Soviet Union is nondiscriminating with regard to who, what and



where they attack. They attack any nationality, any type aircraft, civilian or military, anywhere they perceive a threat to their national security. Their paranoia of being spied on has led to the destruction of millions, perhaps billions of dollars worth of aircraft and more tragically the loss of over 350 lives and the unaccountability of numerous other people. Moscow established its own rules and policy and the world has no option but compliance. Soviet aerial aggression will continue, aircraft will be shot down and people will be killed if nations do not heed the warning. History does repeat itself and the lesson to be learned is painfully clear. The Soviet Union will take any action necessary to prevent the outside world from what they perceive as spying. Proven time after time, their policy is to shoot first and not answer questions later.

This paper addresses but a few of the incidents involving Soviet aerial aggression. The author believes there are still more never reported. It should now be understood that the tragic destruction of KAL-007 was not a surprise, but a predictable outcome. Equally predictable is another air disaster, perhaps worse than KAL-007, near a sensitive Soviet area. It is just a matter of time.

# Soviet Aerial Incident Locations, 1946-1986



1. 1983 Korean Airlines Shootdown
2. 1950 US Navy Privateer Shootdown
3. 1952 Swedish Catalina Shootdown
4. 1955 US Navy Neptune Crash Landing
5. 1958 USAF C-130 Shootdown
6. 1960 USAF RB-47 Shootdown
7. 1964 USAF T-39 Shootdown
8. 1968 US Airliner Forcedown
9. 1978 Korean Airlines Forcedown
- X. Other Soviet Aerial Incidents

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## APPENDIX

### AERIAL INCIDENTS: A CHRONOLOGY FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1946-1986

#### 1946

- 9 AUG Yugoslavian fighters force down USAF C-47 transport plane near Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, two injured.
- 19 AUG Yugoslavian fighters and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) shoot down USAF C-47 transport plane near Italian/Yugoslavia border, five dead.
- 5 SEP Yugoslavian AAA downs Greek Spitfire fighter plane near Yugoslavian border.
- 5 OCT Yugoslavian fighters force down British C-47 courier plane near Yugoslavian border.

#### 1950

- 8 APR USSR fighters shoot down US Navy Privateer aircraft over Baltic Sea, ten dead.
- 2 MAY Israeli fighters force down United Nations (UN) plane over Israel.

#### 1951

- 6 NOV USSR fighters shoot down US Navy Neptune bomber in Sea of Japan near Vladivostok, USSR, ten dead.
- 17 NOV USSR fighters force down USAF C-47 transport plane near Hungary/Yugoslavia border.

#### 1952

- 29 APR USSR fighters fire on French airliner near Berlin Corridor, three injured.
- 13 JUN USSR fighters shoot down Swedish C-54 trainer plane over Baltic Sea, eight dead.
- 16 JUN USSR fighters shoot down Swedish PBY "Flying Boat" over Baltic Sea.
- 7 OCT USSR fighters shoot down USAF B-29 bomber over northern Japan, eight dead.
- 8 OCT USSR fighters fire on USAF C-47 hospital plane in/near Berlin Corridor.

## CONTINUED

### 1953

- 18 JAN Red Chinese AAA down US Navy Neptune bomber off Swatow, Red China, 11 dead.
- 16 FEB USAF fighters fire on Soviet fighters over Hokkaido, Japan.
- 10 MAR Czechoslovakian fighters shoot down USAF F-84 aircraft near Bavaria.
- 12 MAR USSR fighters shoot down British RAF bomber in/near Berlin Corridor, six dead.
- 13 MAR USSR fighters fire on British airliner in/near Berlin Corridor.
- 15 MAR USSR fighters fire at USAF RB-50 reconnaissance plane northeast of Petropavlovsk, Kanchatka Peninsula USSR.
- 29 JUL USSR fighters shoot down USAF B-50 bomber over Sea of Japan, 16 dead.

### 1954

- 2 JAN USSR fighters attack USAF reconnaissance aircraft off North Korean coast.
- 12 MAR Czechoslovakian fighters fire on two US Navy planes near German/Czechoslovakia border.
- 3 JUN Yugoslavian fighters fire at Belgium DC-3 transport near Austrian/Yugoslavian border.
- 26 JUN US Navy Skyraiders shoot down two Red Chinese LA-7 fighters off of Hainan.
- 23 JUL Red Chinese fighters shoot down British airliner off Hainan in South China Sea, 10 dead.
- 4 SEP USSR fighters shoot down US Navy patrol craft 40 miles off Siberian coast, one dead.
- 7 NOV USSR fighters shoot down USAF RB-29 reconnaissance plane over northern Japan, one dead.

### 1955

- 5 FEB USSR fighters attack USAF reconnaissance plane near Japan.
- 10 MAY USSR fighters attack USAF F-86 fighters off of North Korean Coast.

## CONTINUED

22 JUN USSR fighters shoot down US Navy Neptune patrol plane near St. Lawrence Island in Bering Sea, seven injured.  
27 JUN USSR fighters shoot down two Formosa aircraft near Mutsu, one dead.  
27 JUL Bulgarian AAA downs Israeli airliner near Greek/Bulgarian border, 58 dead.  
5 SEP Israeli fighters force down USAF transport plane over Israel.

### 1956

19 APR Egyptian fighters force down USAF DC-3 in Suez Canal Zone.  
21 AUG Red Chinese fighters shoot down US Navy patrol plane off Communist China, 16 dead.

### 1957

12 JUN Red Chinese AAA damages US Navy carrier-based aircraft off Swatow, China.  
12 JUN Red Chinese AAA downs two Nationalist China F-84 fighters off of the Red Chinese Coast.  
15 AUG Czechoslovakian fighters force down a Netherlands airliner in Czechoslovakia.  
13 NOV Israeli fighters force down US civilian private airplane over Israel.  
23 DEC Albanian fighters force down USAF T-33 trainer near border.

### 1958

2 JAN Albanian fighters force down British transport over Albania.  
29 MAY East German fighters force down Belgian RF-84F reconnaissance plane over East Germany.  
27 JUN USSR fighters shoot down USAF C-118 transport plane over Soviet Armenia.  
2 AUG Czechoslovakian fighters force down Belgian airliner over Czechoslovakia.



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## CONTINUED

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2 SEP USSR fighters shoot down USAF C-130 transport plane over Soviet Armenia, six dead, 11 unaccounted for.

7 NOV USSR fighters fire at USAF RB-47 reconnaissance plane over Baltic Sea.

7 NOV USSR fighters fire on USAF reconnaissance plane over Sea of Japan.

1959

20 MAR Swiss fighters force down USAF reconnaissance plane over Switzerland.

10 APR Pakistan fighters shoot down Indian Air Force Bomber near Indian/Pakistan border.

16 JUN North Korean fighters fire on US Navy patrol plane over Sea of Japan, one injured.

16 JUL Hungarian fighters force down Belgian airliner over Hungary.

17 DEC Dominican Republic fighter forces down USAF C-47 transport plane near Dominican Republic/Haiti border.

1960

1 MAY USSR surface-to-air-missile (SAM) downs USAF U-2 reconnaissance plane over Sverdlovsk, USSR.

1 JUL USSR fighter shoots down USAF RB-47 reconnaissance plane over Barents Sea, one dead, three missing.

1961

9 FEB French fighters fire at Soviet airliner over Algeria.

1962

8 JAN USSR fighters force down Belgian airliner near Soviet Armenia border.

18 APR USSR fighters force down German civilian plane near East German border.

21 NOV Thailand fighters force down French C-47 transport over northeast Thailand.

## CONTINUED

### 1963

- 19 JUL Israeli fighters force down four US transports over Israel.
- 3 OCT Czechoslovakian fighters force down West German plane near border, one dead.
- 20 NOV USSR fighters shoot down Iranian aerial survey plane near Turkish, USSR, Iranian border, two dead.

### 1964

- 28 JAN USSR fighters shoot down USAF jet trainer near East German border, three dead.
- 10 MAR USSR fighters shoot down USAF RB-66 reconnaissance plane over/near East German border.
- 19 DEC United Arab Republic fighters force down US civilian plane near Alexandria, two killed.

### 1965

- 9 JAN Israeli fighters fire at Canadian transport near Israeli border.
- 4 APR Israeli fighters force down Spanish airliner near Israeli border.
- 27 APR North Korean fighters fire at USAF RB-47 reconnaissance over Sea of Japan.

### 1966

- 12 APR Red Chinese fighters shoot down US Navy plane in South China Sea.
- 14 JUL USSR helicopter forces down US Army helicopter near East-West German border.

### 1967

- 22 AUG Algerian fighters force down Swiss DC-6 over Algeria.

### 1968

- 30 JUN USSR fighters force down US airliner near Kuril Islands.

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## CONTINUED

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1969  
15 APR North Korean fighters shoot down US Navy EC-121 reconnaissance plane in Sea of Japan, 31 dead.

1973  
21 FEB Israeli fighters shoot down Libyan airliner over Israeli-occupied Sinai, 74 dead.  
21 MAR Libyan fighters fire at USAF C-130 transport plane over Eastern Mediterranean.  
11 AUG Israeli fighters force down Iraqi airliner near Beirut.  
8 OCT South Yemen fighters force down British airliner over South Yemen.

1974  
22 FEB Cuban fighters force down US airliner in Cuban airspace.

1976  
12 APR Israeli fighters force down Saudi Arabian transport over Israel.  
8 MAY Czechoslovakian fighters force down Austrian aircraft for violating Czechoslovakian airspace.  
25 NOV Southern Yemen AAA downs Iranian F-4 fighter for violating airspace.

1978  
19 APR USSR fighters force down South Korean airliner near Murmansk, USSR.  
10 JUN Cuban fighters force down US civilian aircraft near Cuban airspace.

1979  
26 MAR Syria forces US airliner to land for airspace violation.

1981  
28 OCT Syrian fighters force down French airliner for airspace violation.

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## CONTINUED

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1982  
10 APR

Brazilian fighters force down Cuban aircraft for  
airspace violation.

1983  
1 SEP

USSR fighters shoot down South Korean airliner,  
near Sakhalin Island, USSR, 269 dead.

END

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